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ABSTRACT

Studies investigating the impact of parent involvement programs on children's reading ability and children's self concept usually fail to use rigorous research methods. This study utilizes a pre-test/post-test experimental design to investigate the effects of a 12 week parent and child reading intervention on the reading ability and self perceptions of reading ability in second and third grade students. Twenty parents, randomly assigned to the experimental group, participated in the weekly program sessions. The sessions emphasized simple techniques that parents could use at home to help their child in reading, such as relaxed reading, paired reading, and praise and encouragement. The "Basic Reading Inventory" and "The Self Concept as Reader" subscale of the "Motivation to Read" scale were administered to the children before and after the intervention. Statistical analyses revealed significantly greater improvements in reading as measured by the number of errors made on graded passages for the experimental group. No significantly greater improvements were made by the experimental group in terms of the number of errors made on graded word lists or graded comprehension questions, or in self perceptions of reading ability. Findings support the notion of parental involvement in reading to improve reading ability. Contains 59 references. (RJM)

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Parent-Child Reading Programs: Involving Parents in the Reading Intervention Process.

SUMMARY OF DISSERATION RESEARCH

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Title of Study: THE EFFECTS OF A PARENT-CHILD READING PROGRAM ON READING ABILITY AND SELF PERCEPTIONS OF READING ABILITY IN STRUGGLING YOUNG READERS.

Researcher: MARIANNE G. ELLIS

ABSTRACT

Previous researchers have reported mostly positive results when investigating the impact of parent involvement programs on children's reading ability and children's self concept. However, the majority of studies have failed to use rigorous research methods and have not investigated the domain-specific construct of self perceptions of reading ability. This study utilized a pre-test/post-test experimental design to investigate the effects of a 12 week parent and child reading intervention on the reading ability and self perceptions of reading ability in second and third grade students. Twenty parents, who were randomly assigned to the experimental group, participated in the weekly program sessions. The sessions emphasized simple techniques that parents could use at home to help their child in reading, such as relaxed reading, paired reading, discussion questions, and praise and encouragement. Prior to the intervention and at the conclusion of the intervention, children were administered the "Basic Reading Inventory" and "The Self Concept as Reader" subscale of the "Motivation To Read" scale. A subset of eight parents and eight children were also interviewed before and after the program. Statistical analyses revealed significantly greater improvements in reading as measured by the number of errors made on graded passages for the experimental group. No significantly greater improvements were made by the experimental group in terms of the number of errors made on graded word lists or graded comprehension questions, or in self perceptions of reading ability. Qualitative analyses revealed information regarding: the utility of the techniques used in the program, the importance of tailoring techniques to meet family's needs, essential aspects of the program, and information about attrition and barriers to reading at home. Results of this study support the notion of parental involvement in reading to improve reading ability and the importance of obtaining qualitative information from parents regarding their needs and perceptions. Findings also indicate that additional research needs to be conducted in the area of parental involvement in reading that utilizes rigorous research and design methods including no-treatment control groups and statistical analyses.

SUMMARY OF METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

This study utilized a pre-test/post-test experimental design to investigate the effects of a 12 week parent and child reading intervention on the reading ability and self perceptions of reading ability in second and third grade students. The study involved four elementary schools in Northern Virginia. Second and third grade students who were approximately six or months below grade level in reading were identified for the program by their teacher and/or the school reading specialist. Invitation letters and permission slips were distributed to approximately 250 parents. Affirmative permission slips were received from 82 parents. Students were then randomly assigned to either the experimental group or control group. At the same time two parents and two children were randomly chosen from each elementary school to participate in qualitative interviews. At the conclusion of the study, the total number of students who participated totaled 58; 20 in the experimental group and 38 in the control group.

During the pretest phase each student was assessed in individual test sessions using the Basic Reading Inventory and the Self Concept Subscale of The Motivation to Read Scale. Several students were interviewed regarding their reading ability and reading habits, as well. Also during the pretest phase, parent interviews were conducted which focused on: parental perceptions of child's strengths and weaknesses in reading, current at-home reading habits, and expectations about the reading program. Interviews lasted anywhere from 20 to 60 minutes and took place either at the child's school or at the parent's home. The entire pretest phase lasted four weeks.

During the intervention phase, four different parent-child reading programs were run; one at each school. The groups met for one hour, once a week for 12 weeks. Three of the groups met during the evening. One met during the day. Session times were determined by parent preference. During individual weekly sessions, parents were provided information and techniques to enable them to work successfully with their child at home in reading. The children attended some, but not all of the weekly sessions. Specifically, the program focused mainly on the use on four techniques: relaxed reading, paired reading, comprehension questions, and praise & encouragement. However, other techniques were added based on parents' needs and requests and my observations of the group sessions. For example, parents from two of the schools requested information regarding in-school reading instruction. Therefore, a handout and explanation of basic instructional styles were given to parents in these groups. It also became evident during the pretest parent interviews that parents wanted simple, concrete activities or tools to use with their children. Therefore, a game-like format was used in presenting and practicing many of the techniques. Since many parents voiced concerns about word recognition skills and phonetic skills, one session was dedicated to these skills, again using a game like format. Parents learned techniques during

the weekly sessions and practice them at home with their children. Some techniques were practiced with the children during session time.

All of the techniques used in the program were aimed at increasing young readers' word recognition skills, oral reading skills, reading comprehension skills; as well as their self-confidence in reading. Parents learned these techniques in an open and supportive environment. Discussion and parent participation was encouraged throughout the program. Gradually parents began to spontaneously participate and discuss their feelings and perceptions, especially in terms of their child's abilities and their successes and difficulties in working with their child. Parents communicated frequently with one another, providing both ideas and support.

During the last session of the program, a written evaluation form was given to each parent to complete. The information obtained from these written evaluations was incorporated as part of the qualitative data collected in the study.

During the design and implementation phase of the project the issue of attrition was considered and addressed. The techniques designed into the program itself to curtail attrition included: free onsite childcare, free refreshments, free children's books, and a fishbowl lottery where one member of each group would win a $25 dollar gift certificate to a local bookstore. Attrition was also battled by calling all parents to remind them of the first weekly sessions, making reminder phone calls periodically throughout the program, mailing home handouts to parents who missed a session, setting up alternative meeting times for parents to review missed information.

At the conclusion of the 12 week program, the post test phase begin. All children were retested using the BRI and the Motivation to Read Scale. Parents and children were reinterviewed. Since five of the original parents interviewed and two of the original children interviewed did not complete the program, other parents and children were interviewed in their place. Follow-up interviews were conducted with seven parents who did not complete the program to determine why they left the program and how the program could be redesigned to better meet their needs. This information was also included as part of the qualitative results. The entire posttest phase lasted four weeks.

Both quantitative and qualitative analyses were used to study the results of the program. The quantitative analysis included four separate analyses of covariance for each of the four dependent variables. Three of four the dependent variables measured reading ability. They included: the number of errors on graded oral reading lists, the number of errors on graded oral reading passages, and the number of errors on the graded oral comprehension questions. The last dependent variable measured self concept of reading

ability. It was the raw score on the self concept subscale on The Motivation to Read Scale. The ancova yielded significant results (.05 level) on one of the four measures; the number of errors made on graded passages. Students who participated in the reading program made significantly larger gains in reading ability (as measured by the oral reading of passages) than did the students in the control group, who were not involved in the program.

It is possible that other significant improvements were not made because of the relatively small size (n=20) of the experimental group or because of the design of the study which involved post testing immediately following the conclusion of the program. Larger improvements may have been found if post testing was conducted some time later, after the parents and children had been using the reading techniques for a longer period of time. It is also important to note that rather large gains in reading ability were made by both the experimental and control groups. Therefore, it is absolutely crucial that control groups are used in measuring the effectiveness of reading programs to factor out the impact of natural reading progress.

No significant changes were found in the students' self perceptions of their reading ability. In fact their self-perceptions remained very stable from pretest to posttest. Likewise, the students' own descriptions of their strengths and weaknesses remained the same from the pre interviews to the post interviews. Perhaps it takes a much longer time interval to change student's self-perceptions or their reading ability. In order for their self perceptions to improve, students may need to experience long term reading success and receive positive feedback from not only their parents, but from peers and teachers as well. While children's self perceptions did not change according to their responses on the self concept scale, parents noted that their children were more confident readers following the program. However, parents reported this increase in confidence in terms of a more positive attitude towards reading and a greater interest in reading (i.e. reading more often, trying harder). Therefore, reading attitude or reading interest may impacted by parent-reading programs, more so than self-perceptions of reading ability.

The qualitative analysis included pre and post test interviews with parents and students, observations made during weekly sessions, follow-up interviews with parents who dropped out of the program, and written program evaluations. The qualitative analyses yielded information on five main topics: attrition, barriers to involvement, parent to parent interaction, child involvement, and individual family prescriptions.

Two main factors appeared tied to attrition: lack of time, and perceived lack of program utility Parents who did and did not complete the program both commented on the difficulty of time constraints. Some parents who did not complete the program felt they were already familiar with the techniques or were

concerned that their children would not be participating in every group session. Therefore, the program lacked usefulness for some parents. In order to improve attendance and utility for all parents the following changes could be made to the reading program: decrease number of sessions from twelve to eight, involve the children in every weekly session, and offer beginning and advanced versions of the program.

Three main factors arose as barriers to involvement for parents: time, frustration, lack of knowledge. Parents who completed the program reported that the barriers of time and frustration did not go away as a result of the program, but that they learned who do deal with the barriers more effectively. For example, parents learned to be more patient with the children. They realized when they needed to stop working with them to avoid frustration and anger. They also learned to prioritize activities and spend short, but meaningful chunks of time engaged in reading activities. Parents who completed the program reported that their knowledge regarding how to work with their child improved greatly as a result of the program.

From observations and reports from parents who completed the program, parent to parent interaction was an important part of the program on several levels. First of all, parents felt a sense of camaraderie or support from meeting with other parents who were having similar experiences regarding their child's reading development. Secondly, parents learned from each other. They exchanged ideas and shared information with one another. Lastly, it is possible that they parents who did not complete the program did not have a need for group support or that the program was not meeting their need for group support.

The importance of child involvement became quite evident through interviews and observations. The parents wanted to involve their children in more of the weekly sessions. Their need to spend structured time with their child was even more pressing then their need to discuss their children's reading issues with other parents. Parents wanted the structured, quality, distraction-free, one on one reading time with their child that they were not able to get at home. Most parents learned best with that direct experiential format. However, there were a some exceptions. A few parents reported that their children distracted them from learning. The last important facet of child involvement was the fact that the children really enjoyed coming to the sessions. They seemed to crave that direct parent attention and they encouraged their parents to come to the weekly sessions.

The last important theme regarded the importance of individual family prescriptions. The children involved in the program had unique strengths and weaknesses and their families had unique needs and abilities. Therefore, each family needed a unique family reading prescription While most parents found most techniques helpful, some tailoring had to be done for each family based on time and ability level of parents, skill areas to be worked on, likes and dislikes, etc. For example, a student who was a choppy,

unsure reader, who had difficulties with word recognition, but strong comprehension skills and fairly busy parents; would likely benefit from using paired reading and playing word bingo with his or her siblings.

In conclusion, this research supports the importance and feasibility of parent-child reading programs. Parents want to be involved in their children's reading development and enjoy interacting with other parents when learning how to effectively work with their children in the area of reading. Improvements in reading ability can result from parent involvement programs, but it is essential to use a control group research design to accurately measure changes in reading ability, since children who aren't involved in such programs are capable of making large reading gains, as well. In terms of self-perceptions of reading ability - more research is needed, but it appears that parent involvement may impact the child's interest in reading or attitude towards reading more than their child's perceptions regarding their ability.

Attached are several tables which describe the demographics of the research sample, the pre and post test scores, and multiple ancovas.

Pretest and Posttest Scores for All Dependent Variables

	Pre-test Scores			Post-test Scores			
Dependent Variable	Mean	S.D.	Range	Mean	S.D.	Adjusted Mean	Range
Experimental Group							
Self-Perceptions of Reading	23.30	5.10	15-32	24.60	3.19	24.65	17-31
Graded Word Lists	29.25	11.05	2-42	21.05	9.58	20.33	0-39
Graded Oral Passages	43.70	17.49	2-60	26.20	20.37	25.16	2-60
Passage Comprehension	22.45	5.59	10-30	15.50	7.35	14.82	4-28
Control Group							
Self-Perceptions of Reading	23.66	3.53	16-30	24.11	2.94	24.05	18-30
Graded Word Lists	27.55	11.85	2-42	21.16	11.32	21.88	1-42
Graded Oral Passages	41.50	18.44	3-60	30.34	19.54	31.38	2-60
Passage Comprehension	20.87	7.10	8-30	15.7	7.53	16.40	3.5-29

Note. The values for the Self-Perceptions of Reading variable represent raw scores from the "Me and My Reading" instrument. The values for the other three variables represent number of errors.

Demographic Characteristics of Total Sample, Experimental Group, and Control Group

Demographic Characteristics	Group		
	Total (n=58)	Experimental (n=20)	Control (n=38)
Gender			
Male	29 (50%)	12 (60%)	17 (44.7%)
Female	29 (50%)	8 (40%)	21 (55.3%)
Race			
Caucasian	35 (60.3%)	12 (60%)	23 (60.5%)
African-American	18 (31.0%)	7 (35%)	11 (28.9%)
Hispanic	3 (5.2%)	1 (5%)	2 (5.3%)
Middle Eastern	2 (3.4%)	0 (0%)	2 (5.3%)
Grade			
Second	32 (55.2%)	13 (65%)	19 (50%)
Third	26 (44.8%)	7 (35%)	19 (50%)
School			
One	13 (22.4%)	5 (25%)	8 (21.1%)
Two	12 (20.7%)	7 (35%)	5 (13.2%)
Three	20 (34.5%)	4 (20%)	16 (42.1%)
Four	13 (22.4)	4 (20%)	9 (23.7%)
Age			
Mean	8.03	8.03	8.04
Standard Deviation	7.87	7.57	8.13
Range	7-0 to 9-9	7-2 to 9-0	7-0 to 9-9

Note. The values for all the characteristics, except age, represent the number and percentage of students in each category.

Multiple Analysis of Covariance of Self Perceptions of Reading Ability, Graded Word Lists, Graded Oral Passages, and Graded Comprehension Questions by Group

Source	DF	MS	F	P
Graded Word Lists				
Covariate	1	5407.39	276.76	.000
Group	1	31.22	1.60	.212
Within Cells	55	19.54		
Graded Oral Passages				
Covariate	1	16310.73	157.25	.000
Group	1	504.13	4.86	.032
Within Cells	55	103.73		
Graded Comprehension Questions				
Covariate	1	1830.08	81.48	.000
Group	1	31.54	1.34	.252
Within Cells	55	23.52		
Self Perceptions of Reading Ability				
Covariate	1	88.55	11.49	.001
Group	1	4.77	.62	.435
Within Cells	55	7.71		

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